

REMEMBER THE POOR

Galatians 2:10

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A few years ago one of my mentors passed away. He was a very godly man named Glynn Rhinehart. When I was in high school or college (I can't remember), I asked him what his favorite Christian book was. He thought for just a second, and he answered, *In His Steps*, by Charles Sheldon. Have you heard of that book? It's a classic. Some of you remember a couple of decades ago when the WWJD movement was going on. It started with WWJD bracelets, and then T-shirts and other apparel, and then more. WWJD stands for What Would Jesus Do? The idea is that as Christians our goal is to be Christlike; therefore, in every situation ask yourself, What would Jesus do? That whole idea and movement comes from the book *In His Steps*, published way back in 1896. It's about a pastor, Henry Maxwell. One Friday afternoon as he was preparing his sermon a man out of work shows up at his door and asks for help. Pastor Maxwell listened to his complaints, and then sent him away without helping him. That Sunday during the sermon the same homeless man, Jack Manning, walked into the sanctuary, and walked up to the front of the church and stood in front of the pulpit. And he confronted the congregation about their lack of compassion. Then he collapsed, and a few days later he died. Deeply moved by this event, the next Sunday Reverend Maxwell presented his congregation with a challenge: "Do not do anything without first asking, 'What would Jesus do?'"
2. Somehow that pastor and that congregation had forgotten the poor. They were at church weekly. They read their Bibles and sang the hymns. They cared about righteousness and sin. But they had somehow forgotten the poor, and it took a terrible incident to wake them up.
3. I wonder if our church has forgotten the poor. I wonder if you have forgotten the poor. I wonder if I have forgotten the poor. I wonder if we need a wake-up call ourselves.
4. Today we are going to study what the Bible says about how Christians should treat the poor.

II. TEXT: GALATIANS 2:9-10

1. **Galatians 2:9-10** "9 When James, Cephas, and John—those recognized as pillars—acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They asked only that we would remember the poor, which I had made every effort to do."
2. Paul was sent out by the church in Antioch as a missionary to the Gentiles. He started church in Galatian, a Roman province, and returned to give a report. Then men from Jerusalem arrived in Antioch and claimed that it was not enough for

Gentiles to have faith in Jesus; they also needed to convert to Judaism. To settle this dispute, Paul and others were sent to visit the apostles in Jerusalem. After hearing from Paul, the apostles, James (the half-brother of Jesus), Cephas (Peter), and John, they sided with Paul. The Gentiles don't need to become Jewish; they simply need to have faith in Christ. And then they gave Paul their blessing to continue preaching to the Gentiles. But they sent him out with one qualification: Remember the poor. Scholars believe they were specifically talking about the poor in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been experiencing a terrible famine, and along with severe persecution, this led to many Christians in Jerusalem experiencing extreme poverty. Prior to this, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem by the church in Antioch specifically to bring money to help the Christians in Jerusalem. And so the apostles were encouraging Paul to keep this up. "In all your work and travels, Paul, don't forget to help the poor."

3. That is a clear command for Christians in every generation. Remember the poor.

III. WHO ARE THE POOR?

1. Who are the poor? The poor are those who don't have what they need. They lack necessities like adequate food, shelter, clothing, medicine, education, safety, transportation, heating and cooling. Poverty can extend beyond material needs to emotional and include people who lack friends, family, and good role models, etc.

IV. IT IS POSSIBLE TO FORGET THE POOR

1. The first thing that jumps out from this text is that it is possible to forget the poor. Otherwise there would be no need for the admonition to remember the poor.

2. There are several reasons why Christians might forget the poor:

i. We might get so busy that we don't notice them.

1. We are so busy with our family, and work, and hobbies, and church, and with other endeavors that we don't see the poor and needy around us.

2. It reminds me of when I was a kid and I walked into the kitchen and put a piece of trash into an already overflowing trash can and walked away. Before I made it too far my dad stopped me and said, "If you see that the trash can is overflowing, don't just add to it; take it out." I said, "I didn't even notice." From then on I noticed. I think a lot of Christians are so self-absorbed that we don't notice that there are needy people around us, and we're not doing anything for them.

ii. We might focus so much on spiritual needs that we overlook physical needs.

1. The worst kind of poverty is spiritual poverty – living without salvation. And the church's primary mission is preaching the gospel. But that doesn't mean that physical needs are unimportant, and that God doesn't want us to meet physical needs.

2. Every year there are football teams that have a great offense, but no defense, and therefore they lose. Offense is important, but to win a

championship you need a great offense and defense. Drew Brees is one of the top quarterbacks of all time. With him at quarterback, every year we had one of the top offenses in the league. He played for the Saints for 15 years, and we only made it to the Super Bowl one time. Why? Good offense is not enough. You have to have good defense too.

3. As Christians we need to focus first and foremost on spiritual needs. Spiritual needs are crucial. But physical needs are important too.
 4. Think about God's relationship to you. He doesn't just promise to save your soul, but He promises to meet your needs. He doesn't just care about your spiritual life, but your whole life. We should do the same.
- iii. We might condemn the poor.
1. Sometimes Christians purposefully ignore the poor because they look down on them as sinful. We assume they are not worthy of our help because, after all, it was their sinfulness that got them where they are.
 2. But don't sinners deserve our help? You are a sinner, and doesn't God help you?
 3. What if God only helped you when you deserved it? Would He ever help you?
 4. If we only help the perfectly righteous, we'll never help anyone.
- iv. We might be selfish.
1. Sometimes Christians succumb to the sin of selfishness. We don't want to share our time, money, and resources with others because we want to hoard it all for ourselves.
 2. Sometimes the problem is not forgetting the poor but loving ourselves too much. We have time and money to share, but we don't want to share.
 3. All of us are prone to selfishness. When someone shows you a family picture, who's the first person you look at? And if you look good, then it's a good picture, regardless of how everyone else looks. We are all prone to selfishness, but God wants us to remember the poor.

V. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT THE POOR?

1. They are just as valuable as you and me.
 - i. **Job 34:19** "God is not partial to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands."
 - ii. This verse teaches two things about the poor:
 1. God made them. Poor people are "the work of his hands." They are human beings made in the image of God. They are just as important as you; just as valuable as you; just as worthy as you.

- 2. God loves them the same as the rich. God “does not favor the rich over the poor.” Just because you aren’t poor doesn’t mean that God loves you more. God loves all people equally, and we should too.
- iii. All this means that the poor are worthy of our love, our respect, our time, our attention, our efforts. They are important.
- 2. Sometimes poverty is caused by sin.
 - i. What causes poverty? It is often self-inflicted, the result of sinful choices.
 - ii. When my oldest daughter was younger, five or six years old, she was hanging out with her cousin Timothy at her grandparents house. And grandma fussed at Timothy because he didn’t do his homework. So Carter looked at Timothy and said, “Bad choices Timpathy!” Poverty is often caused by bad, sinful choices.
 - iii. Remember the story of the Prodigal Son. A man had two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance early, and then left home for a distant country, where he “squandered his estate in foolish living.” Then he was left with nothing. Why was he poor? Sinful choices.
 - iv. Every one in this room knows someone personally who is poor because of “poor choices.”
 - v. The Bible mentions many sinful choices that lead to poverty:
 - 1. Sin in general.
 - a. **Proverbs 13:25** “A righteous person eats until he is satisfied, but the stomach of the wicked is empty.”
 - b. Sometimes we call sinful choices “poor choices.” I wonder if this is why. Sin often and usually leads to poverty.
 - 2. Laziness.
 - a. **Proverbs 6:10-11** “10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, 11 and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit.”
 - b. Many people are poor because they don’t like to work.
 - 3. Ignoring discipline and correction.
 - a. **Proverbs 13:18** “Poverty and disgrace come to those who ignore discipline, but the one who accepts correction will be honored.”
 - b. There are two ways to learn: You can learn from others, or you can learn from experience. If you insist on being the latter, you are more likely to experience poverty. If you ignore advice, and counsel, and warnings, and corrections, and just keep going full steam ahead after the people who love you have yelled “Stop!”, then you are on the path of poverty.
 - 4. Substance abuse.

- a. **Proverbs 23:21** “For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor, and grogginess will clothe them in rags.”
 - 5. Poor money management.
 - a. Proverbs 21:5 “The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit, but anyone who is reckless certainly becomes poor.”
 - b. If you handle your money recklessly, and don’t carefully plan your spending, you will go broke.
 - c. A 2023 article by the AP reported that 70% of lottery winners go bankrupt.
 - d. A 2022 article in Fox Business reported that 78% percent of pro athletes go broke after just three years of retirement.
 - vi. Several years ago the Brookings Institution released a study in which they found that, in the United States, if you do just four things, your chances of remaining in poverty are almost zero. Graduate high school, don’t get married until you are 21, don’t have babies until you are married, and get a full-time job. In other words, make good choices and you likely won’t be poor for very long!
- 3. Sometimes poverty is not caused by sin.
 - i. Often poverty is caused by bad circumstances: natural disaster; fire; sickness; death of a loved one; injustice.
 - ii. 1 Kings 17 tells about a widow who was poor because of a famine.
 - iii. 2 Kings 4 talks about a widow who was poor because her husband passed away and the creditors were demanding payment.
 - iv. In Luke 21 Jesus tells the story of a poor widow in the temple. The rich dropped their offerings in the temple treasury, and then a poor widow dropped in two lepta, the smallest and least valuable Greek coins in circulation. And yet Jesus said she was more generous than all the rich. In other words, she was more righteous than the rich, yet she was poor.
 - v. In Luke 16 Jesus told the story of Dives and Lazarus. Dives (rich in Latin) was a wealthy man, and Lazarus was a poor homeless man who begged Dives for food. But Dives never helped him. Eventually they both died, and Dives went to hell, and Lazarus went to heaven. The poor man was more righteous than the rich.
 - vi. **Proverbs 28:6** “Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong.”
 - 1. Sometimes the poor are people of integrity, but the rich are wicked.
 - vii. **Proverbs 28:11** “A rich person is wise in his own eyes, but a poor one who has discernment sees through him.”
 - 1. Sometimes the poor are wise, and the rich are foolish.

- viii. In other words, we must not judge the poor, assuming that they are poor because they wicked or foolish. Often poverty is the result of bad circumstances, the result of living in a fallen world.
4. The poor face tough challenges.
 - i. To treat the poor correctly, you have to see them correctly.
 - ii. Poor people face several challenges.
 1. Financial troubles.
 - a. It's hard to imagine what it is like to be poor, because most of us have never been poor. We have had financial hardships. We have been in the lower income bracket; but we have never been poor. It's hard to imagine not having enough food, not having a home, not having air conditioning, not having warm water, not having transportation. But this is a reality for many people.
 2. Spiritual troubles.
 - a. In Proverbs 30:8-9, the author prays for neither riches nor poverty. Not riches, so that he doesn't forget about God, and not poverty, so that he doesn't steal. In other words, poverty leads to the temptation to steal. You may say, "I'm not tempted to steal." Perhaps that's because you can buy anything want. What if you were poor, hungry, cold, desperate? What if your children were hungry?
 3. Emotional troubles.
 - a. Proverbs 31:5-6 "Give beer to one who is dying and wine to one whose life is bitter. Let him drink so that he can forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more."
 - b. In this passage the author is making the point that kings and leaders need to stay away from alcohol. But he actually has sympathy for poor people who drink because their life is so miserable.
 4. Relational troubles.
 - a. Nobody wants to be a poor person's friend. **Proverbs 14:20** "A poor person is hated even by his neighbor, but there are many who love the rich."
 - b. Nobody respects a poor person. **Ecclesiastes 9:16** "... the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heeded."
 - c. They are more exposed to danger. The Bible often speaks about the need to rescue and defend and protect the poor (Ps 72:12-14). Why? Because they are more exposed to oppression, and injustice, and violence. They don't necessarily

live in a brick home with locks on the doors and windows. They often don't have health insurance, and life insurance, and the education to tell the difference between a good deal and a scam.

d. So the Bible tells us to remember the poor.

VI. HOW TO REMEMBER THE POOR

1. Let's get practical. What does it mean to remember the poor? The Bible says to rescue them, have pity on them, and redeem them from oppression and violence (Ps 72:12-14); it says to be kind to them (Pr 14:31); it says to not mock them (Pr 17:5); it says to share with them (Pr 22:9); to open your hand willingly to them, and don't be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them (Dt 15:7, 11); it says to share your food with them (Is 58:7); to invite them into your home (Is 58:7); and to clothe them (Is 58:7).
2. But perhaps the best way to talk about what it means to remember the poor is with two Bible stories. One is a story of what not to do; the other is a story of what to do.
3. In James 2, James presents a hypothetical. If you are having church, and a rich person comes in the door followed by a poor person, don't discriminate. Don't treat them differently. Don't suck up to the rich person and ignore the poor person. Treat them with the same attention and care.
4. The second story is told by Jesus in Luke 10. He starts out by saying you should love your neighbor as yourself. Treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated. And they ask him, "Who is my neighbor?" So Jesus illustrates with a story. A Jewish man on the way to Jerusalem was attacked, robbed, and left half-dead by the side of the road to die. A Jewish priest passed by, saw, but didn't stop. A Jewish Levite passed by, saw him, but didn't stop. But then a Samaritan passed by. Jews and Samaritans typically hated and avoided each other, but this Samaritan saw the man in need, had compassion, went over to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring on wine and olive oil. He put him on his animal, brought him to a hotel, and took care of him. The next day he paid the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him, and when I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever you spend."
5. That's what it means to remember the poor.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Before we close, I want to read a passage of Scripture to you. The Bible mentions many reasons to remember the poor, and we don't have time to go into all of them. In other words, we shouldn't remember the poor only out of obedience, although that is reason enough. But we have other reasons that we don't have time to get into: It glorifies God (Ps 140:12); it is a good witness (Mt 5:16); it confirms your salvation (1 Jn 3:17); it results in eternal rewards (1 Tim 6:18-19), just to name a few. But to show you how important this is to God, and how much God will reward you, just listen to this.
2. **Psalm 41:1-3**
1 Happy is one who is considerate of the poor;

the LORD will save him in a day of adversity.

2 The LORD will keep him and preserve him;
he will be blessed in the land.

You will not give him over to the desire of his enemies.

3 The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed;
you will heal him on the bed where he lies.

3. The Bible says that we are all spiritually poor without Christ. We are sinners, and we are headed for hell. But Christ became poor for our sake, that we might become rich. He came to earth and died on the cross to take our punishment. If we put our faith in Jesus, God will forgive us, and give us eternal life.